



U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS BALTIMORE DISTRICT

NEWS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS
PUBLIC AFFAIRS OFFICE
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21203-1715
(410) 962-2809 FAX: (410) 962-3660
CONTACT: Christopher Augsburger
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Corps denies permit for Wilkes-Barre inflatable structure

BALTIMORE — The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District, has denied the Luzerne County Flood Protection Authority a Department of Army permit to construct an inflatable structure across the Susquehanna River in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. Fully inflated, the structure would have reached 9.5 feet high and impounded 4.5 miles of the free flowing river.

The purpose for the Wilkes-Barre Inflatable Structure was to provide economic development potential for the Wyoming Valley region and mitigate for the impacts to river access and the loss of recreational opportunities caused by the raising of the Wyoming Valley levees in 2003. The Corps found that the project's purpose could be met using other alternatives that would have fewer impacts on special aquatic sites. Alternatives evaluated as part of the permit process included versions of an inflatable structure and non-impoundment alternatives, such as the Riverfront Development Plan alone or in combination with the West Bank Riverfront Development Plan.

The Corps concluded that the applicant's proposal was not the least environmentally damaging practical alternative and that it was contrary to the overall public interest.

Adverse environmental impacts by the inflatable structure included seasonal inundation of 13.35 acres of riffle pool complexes and permanent fill of about one acre of forested wetlands, both of which are afforded special protection under the Clean Water Act. Due to these impacts, the structure would not have complied with Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, which requires the Corps to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological integrity of the waters of the United States through the control of discharges of dredged or fill material.

The primary goal for the Corps' regulatory program is to protect the Nation's aquatic resources, while allowing reasonable development through fair, flexible and balanced permit decisions that recognize the essential values of the Nation's aquatic ecosystems.

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